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C O N F I D E N T I A L PRAGUE 000346

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [PINS](#) [PINR](#) [SY](#) [LE](#) [EZ](#)

SUBJECT: CZECHS SUPPORT U.S. POSITION ON LEBANON

REF: SECSTATE 39018

Classified By: Classified by DCM Kenneth Hillas for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (SBU) Summary. In a meeting with DCM Hillas, Czech Deputy Minister for Bilateral Relations Petr Kolar and Czech Ambassador to Lebanon Marek Skolil stated that the Czech Republic agrees with the U.S. position about the complete withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon. The Czech MFA issued a statement on Lebanon last week, although not as strong as ours. Kolar assured the DCM of Czech intention to put sustained pressure on Syria regarding Lebanon. Both Kolar and Skolil expressed concern, however, that Syria and Hezbollah will attempt to instigate violence in Lebanon in order to justify its continued presence there. End summary.

2. (SBU) On March 8, DCM Hillas met with Deputy Minister for Bilateral Relations Petr Kolar at the MFA to discuss Czech views on Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon. The meeting was also attended by Czech Ambassador to Lebanon, Marek Skolil, back in Prague for consultations. Kolar expressed immediate support for the U.S. position on Lebanon, pointing to the statement issued by the MFA last week regarding the resignation of PM Umar Karami's government. Calling the resignation "appropriate," the statement calls for restoration of Lebanese sovereignty under UN 1559 and the withdrawal of all foreign military troops from the country. DCM Hillas explained that now was a time of unique opportunity for U.S.-European cooperation to make a difference in Lebanon. In this regard it would be key to place sustained pressure on Syria to withdraw completely from Lebanon. The DCM recognized EU High Representative Solana's statement on Lebanon and stressed the need for consensus in the Council to allow Solana to be sufficiently aggressive and effective in his role. The Czechs concurred on the need for sustained pressure, but cited logistical/housing constraints Syria claims limit its ability to redeploy forces from Lebanon. The Czechs recall similar problems for Soviet forces after the end of the Cold War.

3. (C) Both Kolar and Skolil expressed concern that Syria and Hezbollah may attempt to instigate violent demonstrations in Lebanon, allowing the Syrians to claim that Lebanon is unstable without Syrian forces present and that the Lebanese are unable to quell uprisings on their own. Skolil admitted that the EU has neglected the Lebanon/Syria issue for some time, but that now there is "growing consensus" to "do more" about Lebanon. Skolil noted that maintaining EU focus on the issue would be key. In his view, there is no chance that Syrian forces and intelligence services will completely leave Lebanon within the next two months, noting Czech reports that Syrian personnel at Beirut airport were being replaced by Lebanese employees of Syrian intelligence. Kolar agreed on the need to ensure that international observers are able to monitor upcoming parliamentary elections and that the Fitzgerald Commission receives the necessary cooperation in carrying out its investigation of Hariri's assassination. Skolil stressed the need for the international community to think about how to respond to renewed violence in Lebanon.

4. (C) Comment: Last week's MFA statement did not call for an "immediate" withdrawal or include a reference to Syria's intelligence services. Czech concerns about Syrian capacity to provoke violence in Lebanon and the proper response to such an eventuality is an issue we will need to address as part of a broad strategy for common U.S.- EU action.

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